

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

## A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 247.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1893. PRICE TWOPENCE.

### THROUGH THE RANKS.

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#### CHAPTER IV. THE BELLS OF SHANDON.

WHERE are there to be found sweeter bells than those whose silvery voices drop into the valley of the Lea?

How many a time and oft have I stood by the low stone wall on Patrick's Hill, and listened to their music!

Below you lies the wide-spreading valley; in the distance green, undulating, beautiful; but immediately round the square-towered old church, all is thick with narrow streets and poverty-stricken little cottages—some mere hovels. An easy-going, happy-hearted race, these denizens of this outlying settlement; the women unkempt, the children very scantily dowered as to clothing, but showing such wonderfully beautiful faces here and there, that you long for the pen of an artist to give them life, and a youth that cannot fade, on canvas. In a summer's evening they swarm round the doors and on the high, narrow side-walks like so many bees, and keep up quite as ceaseless a humming; while, by way of variety, a pink-skinned young pig may now and again be seen taking a bath in the white dust of the road, then springing up with a succession of little shrill squeaks, and rushing about hither and thither pursued by young Ireland on bare feet, uttering equally shrill cries of delight; while the matrons at the doors say admiringly to one another:

"Ah, now, the crathur—but he's a swate little gentleman entoirely, and one day he'll be tinder as a chicken. See how

Micky here smoiles at him already now!" and Mick, a very tiny specimen, is held up in his mother's arms, and smiles and crows at the pink pig's antics. An easy-going, lazy sort of folk these Irish, much given to basking in the sun; finding happiness, in a way, even amid poverty, squalor, and overcrowding, that strike the stranger as so appalling; people who would pine and die in one of our model lodging-houses, and infinitely prefer the shelter of a peat-cabin, where you could not see yourself for smoke, to that of the well-ordered and eminently respectable residence in question. So quick in sympathy are these people that your sorrow becomes as their own; the tear in your own eye shines reflected in theirs; yet they have dangerous passions slumbering under this readily stirred nature, and, once conscious of wrong, real or imaginary, know no bounds in the lust of revenge—such are your true Southerners, a loveable, faulty race, whose family ties are a passion, and whose religion is a colossal superstition.

The number of people who were able to find place in one of the small cottages that clustered round the church of Sweet Chimes in Shandon Valley was, in truth, a marvel. The whole place was like a rabbit-warren; ragged urchins running in and out of doors, and squatting on steps or on the curb-stone; veritable children of nature, frank and free, not easily made afraid, gay and sprightly, yet never insolent to the stranger who found himself in their midst.

"Shure, and it's Patsey's own lady!" cried one of these gamins.

"Ah, whist now, can't ye, Tim, and don't be ather makin' too free, you bold gossoon," said his mother severely; at which the bold gossoon straightway hid his head in her petticoats, squinting sideways at the tall

avelte figure of a young English lady, who, with a basket in her hand, came slowly down the sunlit road. He kicked his heels in an agony of delight and shyness as the said lady stopped and spoke to him, all shrouded as he was. Then he showed a face with no nose to speak of, and the widest of mouths full of tiny, pearl-white teeth.

"Patsy's own lady," he said again, evidently convinced that he had made a social success and anxious to repeat it.

"He's the boldest boy as stands in county Cork, is our Tim," said the mother, fondling the rough unkempt head with one hand while she held the baby over her shoulder with the other. "If he met Our Lady herself coming over the hills, he'd just be afther passin' the time o' day to her. Glory be—"

"Never mind, Tim, you'll make a grand soldier one of these days," said the lady, with a smile so passing sweet it might well have made the sunshine blither still, and behold in Tim a mighty transformation! He was out of his mother's gown in a jiffy, out on the side-walk, a very soldier, though a sorry tatterdemalion. No trussed chicken could have been straighter and stiffer than Tim; elbows well back, bare legs keeping perfect step and time, while the shrill little voice rang out a piping clarion:

"Tan-ta-ra-ra, rub-a-dub-dub-dub . . ."

An admiring audience seemed to rise from the ground; Tim's mother by no means the least delighted of the crew. One little fellow beat upon a saucepan he had purloined, keeping time to Tim's song and march. It was quite a little military parade in its way.

Suddenly Tim stopped short, and looked up into the lady's face.

"That's like the men step up on the hill, but"—with a sigh—"they've no drums to be afther bating, the crathurs!"

The lady turned with a look of surprise to the lad's mother.

"What does he mean?" she said. "Do our men drill up on the hills? I never heard of them doing so."

"What does he mane?" cried the other, much disturbed, and shaking the baby up wildly; "what is he manin', my lady; is it the holy saints themselves could tell the manin' of a little misfortnit villain, same as that? Be off wid ye, Tim, now, or I'll be gettin' ye by the scruff o' the neck, and bringin' the devil's fantigues out o' ye by shakin', so I will."

Tim turned one somersault, then another, then walked a few steps on his hands, then

set himself right end uppermost, and grinned. Evidently some new "devil's fantigues" had got possession of him.

"There'll be a tar-barril shinin' out one o' these nights—och, murther! but it 'ill be the best iver seen."

Tim kept well out of reach of the maternal wrath, and kept edging up towards a certain low door leading into a carpenter's shed, and much affected by the youth of that neighbourhood. Yet from this very quarter came vengeance unlooked for and complete. A sinewy arm—one not, indeed, entirely unsuggestive of simian origin, so lean and hairy did it show in the sunlight, was stretched through the dark opening above, and Tim, squeaking like a rat, was lifted by the seat of his breeches high in air, and so conveyed out of sight. It was a wonder that those patched and fragmentary garments stood the strain; the simian hand must, indeed, have taken a firm grip, and held on with a will.

The lady looked troubled at the prompt disappearance of the "bold gossoon," and had to be reassured by Mrs. Doughty in her politest manner.

"Shure, he'll come to no harm, ma'arm. It's just the dad that's afther wantin' him to dig a bit in the potato-patch, an' that's the blessed truth. He's a swate-natured cratur is Tim; but he has his ways, ma'arm, and it's the dad knows how to humour him." Then, with a sudden change of tone: "It's poor wee Patsy you'll be afther comin' to see to-day, the saints make your bed in your own day o' sickness! Well, he's keepin' fairly. Times you'd be thinkin' he'd just die away wid himself, and then he'll be cheerin' up like the sun from behint a cloud. Shure and certain, it's a crool life he leads, an' 'twould be a mercy the dear saints would take him to be one up above, the crathur!"

"We must do what we can while he's left with us here," said the lady softly.

What a delight in a woman is the cadence of a soft, musical voice!

Even Mrs. Doughty, oppressed by the cares of a family like the sands of the sea-shore in winter, and hampered by Tim and his "devil's fantigues," felt the soothing charm of face and voice as she looked and listened. Doubtless in her honest, narrow soul she thought it a pity that a poor Protestant heretic should be so fair to look upon, so sweet to hearken to. Still, the tender Irish heart in Mrs. Doughty's bosom warmed to the woman who had set

herself the loving task of brightening a little suffering life, and bringing light and healing into the darkness of pain and suffering.

There need be no mystery about the fact that the lady with the basket is the heroine of our story. If any carp at the basket as savouring of the too commonplace, I can but plead the sacredness of many of life's most prosaic sides, and the mighty example of one of the greatest writers that the world has ever known—he whose immortal *Charlotte* first appears before the reader, "cutting bread and butter."

After that my basket may be pardoned; the more so as it contained comforts for little Patsey, the child who was always sick and mostly sorry, and who lived—such living as it was—in Shandon Valley.

Alison Drew was not by any means a garrison beauty. There were many more striking girls to be seen in Cork, that city of fair women. Indeed, she did not strike you at all; she won upon you; stole into your heart until—an almost unnoticed presence at first—she filled it completely. Her fine and noble spirit looked out at you through her quiet steadfast eyes of golden hazel; if they had something of wistfulness in them at times, you were not surprised when you knew her story. Her hair—almost the colour of her eyes—fell in soft tendrils upon her brow; her mouth did not appeal to you as anything particular until she spoke to you. Then you were never tired of watching its sensitive curves, and delicate shades of expression. The grace of her figure was not that of languid lines and affected inertness, but that of a lithe activity; and she had the most perfectly formed head ever set upon a woman's shoulders. That she did not shine out among her fellows as some maidens do might be accounted for by the paleness of her colouring, and a something subdued about her whole personality, that gave her an air as of one who rather shrank from general notice and admiration; but with those she loved this reserve gave place to a complete self-surrender. Self-forgetfulness begets courage, therefore Alison Drew was more capable of daring in a supreme moment than most women, who seldom entirely forget the footlights. A youthful cornet of Dragoon species, who prided himself upon his French, once said there was something "morne" about her, and that her eyes had a misty look when she was not talking;

a peculiarity which, he vowed, gave him the creeps.

There may have been some truth in this theory of his; for Alison was one who ever walked within the shadow of a great sorrow.

Her mother, the only sister of Major Henneker of the One Hundred and Ninety-Third regiment of foot, had made a most unhappy marriage; had at length been deserted, and—as so often happens to the gentlest and the best, why, we poor mortals are little able to explain—sorrow upon sorrow fell on her devoted head, bowing it low, even to the dust. A horrible disease fell upon her already enfeebled frame, and death stared her in the face, rather perhaps should we say watched her with grave and pitying eyes, even as a mother watches her little tortured babe and longs to see it close its eyes in the sleep that is eternal rest. "You have suffered enough—come home!" those shadowy eyes seemed to say.

Yet had earth one fond, sweet tie, and that was—Alison.

The daughter's love for the mother was a passion; and the agony of that moment in which Alison was told that death, in one of its most dreadful forms, was inevitable for the one creature she loved of all the world, left its mark upon her life, even as the jagged wound leaves an ineffaceable scar. Not one detail of the trying care needed by such a case was committed to the hand of a stranger, however skilled.

Day and night—night and day—the two women dreed their bitter weird. What communion of hearts, what spiritual agonies and consolations were theirs, who may say? Alison spoke little either then, or ever, of those months of a terrible ordeal, over whose terrors love did still prevail, and faith shone from above as the sun shines upon deep and troubled waters. The end came; the sweet and patient eyes were closed; the wasted hands crossed, as in unquestioning submission, on the once tortured breast. Then Alison gathered herself together to live her life, even as that dear one would have had her live it. She looked out upon all the world with eyes that sought only how she might help and comfort the weary and the heavy-laden. They, of all the world, appealed to her most, since they had in some sort the essence of the loved and lost. Heaven calls upon us all for these fearful struggles after higher things. We cannot

linger weeping by the grave where we have laid our dearest. Life finds no place for haltings by the way. We must on, with what strength we may, crippled, maimed, never as once we were, yet God's own creatures still, with all His work to do.

Alison gladly accepted the offer of her uncle to make his house her home. She was so far independent as to be a burden to none; but her desolation cried out for home-ties and home-surroundings; and now, after four years, it really seemed quite a ridiculous thing to the Hennekers to try and realise that she had not been always with them.

"Mother," Elsie Henneker would say, "however did we get along before Alison came to be one of us?" and Mrs. Henneker had no solution of the question to offer. There was no small significance in the expression "one of us." Alison was not among them; she was of them. You see the first lesson of sorrow is often bitterness; the second, love. At first we are ready to hate all things, because the desire of our eyes is taken from us; then, tears wash away the hardness; we love all the sad and sorrowful creatures of the world for the sake of the loved and lost. It had been so with Alison. The exquisite perfection of her sympathy with others made an atmosphere as of music around her. She was both wise and witty; and through the grey shadow that still hung over her came soft gleams of light and gentle ripple of laughter.

But there was no laughter in her eyes or on her lips, as she sat by little Patsey. Alison had passed down a narrow court, and through the doorway of a sort of shanty that, as Mrs. Doughty put it, "looked the other way"—that is, stood back to back with the houses fronting the lane. The windows of this lean-to were mostly glazed with rags, but here and there an unbroken pane let in a ray of light that fell lovingly upon the face of the sick child. Patsey's couch was a strange one—an old soap-box filled with shavings, with a board nailed across one end for his head to rest upon.

Never would Alison forget the first time she had seen that wonderfully beautiful face looking up at her with an amazed delight, as though she were some angel visitant.

"What—oh, what is this?" she said, more as if speaking to herself than to those about her.

"That's Patsey, ma'arm; just himself and nothing else at all at all," said some

one by; but Alison had neither eyes nor ears for any one. She was down on her knees beside the lowly bed; she had lifted a little withered hand, like a bird's claw, in her own; and the tears were welling up as she met the gaze of the great luminous gray eyes, whose fringes were black as night, and in whose depths lay the spell of a marvellous patience and pathetic endurance.

"He's just a blighted bein', a misfortnit crathur entoirely, is Patsey! He's tin years ould come Michaelmas, an' he's just got no body to spake of. Praise be to the holy saints!"

It was quite true. Patsey's head and face were those of a boy of ten years old; his little shrivelled-up body was but an atomy, and as if that were not enough, the tiny limbs were all twisted, and pain oftentimes racked the feeble frame days and nights together.

Things were a good deal different with little Patsey Molloy since he had found his "own lady." The daintiest little pillow, stuffed with softest eiderdown, lay beneath his head, instead of an old coat folded crosswise as heretofore. He would pat it softly with his elfin fingers as he lay, and never, never let any one but his mother put a hand upon it.

How his face comes back to me as I write, and the sound of his little piping voice, telling, over and over again, the story of how he was changed by the fairies long ago—long—long—ago—"when he was a baby!" Those ten years of ever-suffering life seemed such a long time, you see, to Patsey. He is no creature of my fancy, this poor, wee boy, in his box-cradle; this boy with the lovely face, golden locks, and poor, mummied frame. His patience, his endurance, his pretty, gentle ways, all these are part of a story that is true; the story of a little life that has long since passed through the gate of death, into the haven of rest that lies beyond.

Across the foot of Patsey's bed was now found a second board—moveable, so as to be taken away at night time—and thereon did royally disport themselves many sheep, painfully white, amid trees like pine-apples on sticks, vividly green; the whole tended by two shepherds, apparently second-cousins to Shem, Ham, and Japhet, as seen in Noah's ark. The arrival of these toy figures in Coram's Court had been an epoch; Patsey, for the nonce, had found himself a hero; and sometimes had to turn his golden head aside upon the eider-down



pillow to hide a tear that would come, because the joy of it all was almost too much for him to bear. The story of his being a "changeling" was not without its difficulties to Patsey. Mrs. Molloy would tell how she left the "swate, smolling babe" in a wooden cot before the fire of peat, and how when she came in again, Danny, the old dog, had "ivery hair on his body standing straight on end, an' his teeth grinnin' same as an ould skull, and the cat—bad cess to it—had a back arched up like the bridge across the strame at Molloy's uncle's on the mother's side, which is well known to be like a hog's back for sharpness, an' then we knew 'twas a fairy-craythur had bin an' changed the child, an' from that day Patsey shrivelled up to an atomy. Heaven be his bed one day, praise be to God, who is no respecter of persons at all at all!" Patsey would listen to this marvellous tale with his great, bright eyes fixed upon the mother's face. Then the question of his own identity would rise up and confront him.

"Where did I get to the time I was changed about?" Then, with a bewildered look and a little pucker of the delicate brow: "Wheriver did I get to?"

"Shure, an' it's your own mother's son you are," would Mrs. Molloy break out in a frenzy; "her own illigant Patsey, an' no other; not if the praste himsel' swore different, avick; and it's just the loight of her loife ye are, me darlint, and she'd be but a poor craythur entoiirely, widout ye to smole at her when she comes in from the mass where she's bin prayin' for ye and burnin' a candle as long as me arm—the saints be good to us this day! And isn't it the house widout ye that would be like a cage wid the singin' burred flown and gone? Arrah, now, but there's the truth for ye, me darlint."

On the day when first we have seen Allison Drew wending her way to the little houses in Shandon Valley, her thoughts take saddened form as she turns her steps homewards.

"Does no one see," she thinks, "that the face of the sick boy is growing smaller, the luminous eyes larger and brighter, day by day? Can no one see that the 'singin' burred' is about to take wing and fly—that the hand of death is about to open the cage door and set the little captive free?"

At the turn of the road, above Patrick's Hill, a sunbeam awaited Alison.

It was Elsie, Major Henneker's young daughter, bright-haired, bright-eyed, with

a smile that dazzled the British subaltern, no matter to what branch of the service he belonged, and a love of mischief peculiarly her own.

"Naughty!" she cried, holding up a rallying finger. "I was watching for you. Do hurry up. Mrs. Musters is trying to play the harmonium; she is getting ever so red in the face, and the thing is wheezing horribly; and oh, Alison, the Colour-Sergeant has brought us such a lovely new chant!"

Then the two girls turned into the small and shabby building that went by the name of the Garrison Chapel.

### THE KING'S DOUBLE.

THE likeness was striking, unmistakeable. There, enthroned on a lofty seat above the President of the High Court of Justice, clad in his azure robe embroidered with the arms of France, sat Henry the Second, but just succeeded to the throne on the death of his father, Francis; and now in person opening the Courts after the vacation consequent on the change of sovereign. Here, modestly stationed at the back of the hall, amid a mixed mob of the lower ranks of the followers of the law, bearing as only decoration his tippet of Doctor of Laws, stood Raoul Spifame, Seigneur Des Granges, advocate, and landless lord in a time when wars had struck ruin to many a lofty house of France.

The King, bored by the tedious Latin address of the Chancellor, allowed his eyes to wander over the assembled throng, until they rested on this strange figure opposite to him, his pale countenance lighted up by a stray sunbeam. The King's gaze remained so long fixed on him that all eyes were turned in the same direction, and all noted with astonishment the extraordinary resemblance the young advocate bore to the monarch. It seemed to the King as if he looked on his own portrait, but with his regal vestments transformed to sombre black; and the superstition of the time that shortly before dying one saw his own image appear in mourning garb, made him uneasy and pensive during the rest of the sitting.

On retiring, he informed himself regarding the bearer of this remarkable similarity, and was reassured on learning the name, position, and origin of Raoul Spifame, and the other activities of his position soon effaced the unpleasant impression.

But it was otherwise with Spifame himself. This was a fatal day for him. The pleasantries of his companions at the bar, who called him thenceforth nothing but "Sire," or "Your Majesty," and prolonged and varied this amusement in all sorts of ways, may have upset an already ill-balanced mind. Anyway from this day his incipient madness developed in a definite direction, leaving him sane enough on all other points.

His first strange act was to address a remonstrance to the President regarding some judgement, in his opinion wrongly given. For this he was fined, and suspended from his legal functions for a time. Afterwards he dared, in his pleadings, to attack the laws of the kingdom, and the most respected judicial opinions, often straying from his subject to utter very bold remarks on the Government, not always respecting the Royal authority itself.

This was pushed so far, that the superior magistrates thought they were exercising indulgence in only entirely forbidding the exercise of his profession. Then he frequented the precincts of the Courts, where he used to detain the passers-by and submit to them his ideas of reform and complaints against the judges. Finally his relatives were constrained to demand his civil interdiction, which occasioned his reappearance before the public tribunal.

The result was a grave revolution in his entire nature. Cited before the tribunal as a certain visionary named Raoul Spifame, the Spifame who left the audience was really mad.

As advocate he was permitted to harangue the judges, and had prepared an oration in which he cited from the classics various examples of men falsely accused by their children, but this was never delivered. As he passed through the vestibule of the chamber of procedure, he heard a hundred voices murmur: "It is the King!" "Here is the King!" "Place for the King!" This gave his tottering intelligence a shock like that which breaks a fragile spring. Reason fled, and, mad enough now, he entered the hall, cap on head, and seated himself with Royal dignity. He addressed the councillors as "our right trusty and well-beloved," and honoured the procureur, Noël Baillot, with a gracious salutation. Looking around among the audience he regretted that he did not see Spifame, and asked after his health, referring to himself in the third person as "Our friend Raoul Spifame, of whom we

wish to speak." The case was soon decided, and the poor man was recommended to the care of the physicians and removed, well guarded, to a madhouse, distributing as he passed out many salutations to his "Good people of Paris!"

This judgement was noised at Court, and the King desired to have the discourses of Raoul repeated to him. When told that the improvised King had well imitated the Royal majesty, he only remarked: "So much the better that he does not dishonour his likeness, who has the honour to be made in our image." He ordered the poor fool to be well treated, but showed no desire to see him again.

During the first period of seclusion Spifame's aberration was intermittent. By day his own sad identity was present to him; he recognised himself; but by night his real existence vanished in extraordinary dreams, in which he played a different part. Every night he was Henry the Second; sat in the Louvre; reviewed armies; held councils; presided at splendid banquets. Sometimes he recollected the advocate of the Palais, the Seigneur Des Granges, for whom he felt a warm affection; and dawn never came without his having bestowed on him some brilliant testimony of friendship and esteem—the Cap of the President, a seal of state, or the collar of some Order. To Spifame these dreams were his real life, and his prison a dream. Often at even he would pensively remark: "We have slept badly to-night. Oh, these troublesome dreams!"

One strange scene was reported to the chief doctor by the warder. This man had received Royal largesses, paid out of the little money arising from the sequestered goods of the patient, and had ornamented the cell of Spifame with a steel mirror, glass being forbidden lest the patients should break it and injure themselves. Spifame at first paid little attention to it, but as evening came on, and he walked in his chamber in his usual melancholy way, he suddenly stopped on seeing the reflection of his face. Forced, being still awake, to believe in his real individuality, he believed he saw the King, who had come to pay him a visit. Accordingly he saluted His Majesty with a profound bow. On rising, he saw the image of the supposed Prince also assuming an erect position, which was evidence that the King had returned the salutation. This was a great joy, and an infinite honour. He seized the opportunity, and plunged into

terrible incriminations against the traitors who had put him into this situation, and doubtless aspersed him with His Majesty. The poor gentleman even wept in protesting his innocence, and demanding an opportunity to confound his enemies, and the Prince appeared profoundly touched, for a tear sparkled on his cheek. Spifame's features at this were illumined with joy, while the King smiled with an affable air, and held out his hand. Spifame advanced his hand and struck the mirror, which fell to the ground with a terrific crash, bringing the warders at once.

That night in a dream he ordered freedom to be at once restored to Spifame. For him there was created the high office of "Keeper of the Royal Seal," and he was charged with the restoration of the affairs of the kingdom, which were at the moment in jeopardy. Some days of fever succeeded the shock of these grave events, and Spifame's condition became so serious that the physicians ordered him to be removed to another place, where the company of other patients might turn him occasionally from his habitual meditations, and it was decided at the same time to give him a special companion.

If, however, there was any thought of really improving his condition, a grievous mistake was made. In fact it seemed to be more as a joke that they selected just such another as Raoul himself—mad on one point, otherwise sane enough, and not without parts. This was Claude Vignet, self-styled the Royal Poet, possessed with a mania for tearing up everything not written by himself, believing all other writings to be the rival productions of the inferior poets of the time, who had robbed him of the King's favour.

When the poet was introduced into Spifame's chamber he appeared confounded, and in utter astonishment took a step forward, and, falling on his knees, cried out: "His Majesty!"

"Rise, my friend," said Spifame. "Who are you?"

"Do you not recognise the humblest of your subjects, and the greatest of your poets, O great King? I am Claudius Vignet, the illustrious author of the 'Sonnet to Star-studded Space.' Sire, avenge me on a traitor, the despoiler of my honour, Mellin de Saint-Gelais."

"What! my favourite poet—the keeper of my library!"

"He has robbed me, sire; he has stolen my sonnet, he has misused your goodness."

"Is he really a plagiarist? Then I shall give his post to my brave Spifame, at present travelling in the interests of the kingdom."

"Rather give it to me, and I shall spread your renown from east to west over all the earth."

"You shall have a pension of a thousand crowns, and my old doublet, as yours is very ragged."

"Sire, I perceive my sonnets and epistles have been until now withheld from your knowledge, though all addressed to you. Thus 'tis done in courts—

"That hateful place of shady knaves."

"Claudius Vignet, you leave me no more; you shall be my minister, and you shall put in verse my decrees and my ordinances, and thus shall they be immortalised! And now 'tis the hour when our friend Diana visits us, and 'tis fitting we be left alone."

And Spifame, having thus dismissed the poet, took his usual after-dinner nap.

After a very few days the two were inseparable. For the one the poet was the praise which resounds in all forms round kings, and confirms the idea of their superiority. For the other this incredible resemblance was the certitude of the presence of the King himself. The two were no longer in a prison, but a palace; their rags were splendid garments; their ordinary repasts were banquets, where amid melodious music there arose the harmonious incense of verse.

Spifame after his reveries was communicative, and Vignet was especially enthusiastic after he had dined. The pair held many strange conversations, the pseudo-monarch one day developing plans for the war against Spain; and another day giving vent to his solicitude regarding the organisation and embellishment of the chief town of his kingdom, of which the innumerable roofs spread afar beneath the prisoners' windows.

Vignet, in his lucid moments, heard clearly the noise of iron bars and the clanking of chains. This led him to think that they shut up His Majesty occasionally, and he communicated this observation to Spifame, who answered mysteriously that his Ministers were playing a great game, and that he guessed all their plots. But on the return of his Chancellor, Raoul Spifame, things would change, and with his aid and that of Claude Vignet, his only friends, the King of France would

issue from his bondage, and renew the golden age sung by the poets.

But as deliverance was delayed, Spifame sought to advise the people of the captivity in which their King was held by perfidious councillors, and compiled a proclamation ordering his subjects to rise in his favour. At the same time he issued several edicts and very severe ordinances, in the primitive fashion of throwing them out of the window between the bars, rolled up and weighted with small stones. Unfortunately some fell on the roof of a pig-stye, others were lost in the wet grass of a meadow. One or two perched like birds in the foliage of a lime-tree, where they too were as good as lost.

Seeing the little effect of these public manifestoes, Claude Vignet imagined that their inefficiency was to be ascribed to the fact that they were only in manuscript, and set about founding a Royal printing establishment, in which to reproduce the King's edicts, as well as his own odes. With the little means at his disposal his attempts were elementary, but with infinite pains he contrived to fashion twenty-five wooden letters, with which he laboriously imprinted, letter by letter, the ordinances, which were designedly made very brief. The ink was compounded from the oil and smoke of his lamp.

Thenceforward the edicts were multiplied in a much more satisfactory manner, the boldness of print, rude as it was, giving them an impress of authority which was lacking in mere writing. Some of these documents which were preserved, and have been reprinted several times in later days, are very curious, notably that which declares that King Henry the Second, in Council, having heard the pitiful complaints of his good subjects against the perfidies and injustices of Paul and Jean Spifame, brothers of the faithful subject of that name, condemned them to be tortured, flayed, and boiled, and the ungrateful daughter of Raoul Spifame to be publicly whipped and pilloried, and thereafter shut up in a nunnery. In another proclamation, —the decree by which the judges had deprived him of free access to the Courts of Justice still rankling in his breast—it is in the King's name ordered that all ushers, guards, and persons of any judicial degree whatsoever allow his trusty friend, Raoul Spifame, free entrance into the said Courts, and all advocates, pleaders, and other rabble, are forbidden to hinder his eloquence and the unrivalled delights of his

familiar conversation touching all matters, political or otherwise, on which he may please to give his opinions. Other edicts, always issued in name of the King, treat of justice, finance, war, and specially of the internal police of Paris.

But notwithstanding all these wind-strewn seeds of insurrection cast out for the awakening of the faithful of the good city of Paris, these busy conspirators were astonished at seeing no popular commotion beginning. Spifame attributed this want of success to the watchfulness of the Ministers, and Vignet accounted for it by the persistent hatred of Mellin and Du Bellay. The printing-press was stopped for a time. More serious measures were contemplated. A "coup d'état" was meditated. Never having dreamed of escaping merely to be free, they planned an escape to open the eyes of the Parisians.

Having once set to work, they soon unfixed the bars of their window, without interruption from their jailers, who thought them patient and content with their lot. The press was again set in motion. Four-lined lampoons and incendiary proclamations were struck off in copious numbers, and towards midnight they managed to make their way to freedom, not without some bruises in getting over the walls.

By three in the morning they gained the friendly shelter of a little wood, which might have hid them long enough, but they had no thought of taking minute precautions. It was only necessary to be free for them to be recognised—the one by his subjects, the other by his admirers.

However, they had to await the opening of the city gates at five o'clock. Already the way was cumbered with peasants carrying their produce to the markets. Spifame prudently determined not to discover himself until he reached the heart of the city, and partly covered his face with a corner of his mantle, recommending, at the same time, his companion to veil the brilliancy of his Apollonian countenance by drawing down his grey beaver. As they approached the city Raoul confided to his favourite that he could not have undertaken such a troublesome expedition, and assumed such a shameful incognito, if there had not been for him greater interests at stake than even liberty and power. The unfortunate man was jealous! —jealous of the Duchess of Valentinois, Diana of Poitiers, his beautiful mistress, whom he had not seen for some days, and who might have passed through a thousand



adventures in the absence of her Royal chevalier!

Thus conversing they had already entered the populous streets on the right bank of the river, and soon found themselves in a wide open space near the Church of the Innocents, already thronged with people, it being a market-day.

Noting the brisk movement among the people, which he took for signs of agitation, Spifame could not conceal his satisfaction.

"Friend," said he to the poet, "see how those citizens are already moved, how angry are their faces. There are already in the air the germs of discontent and sedition. See that man armed with a halberd! Oh! unhappy are those who foster civil war! Yet I shall be able to command my arquebusiers to manage all these men, innocent to-day because they second my projects, and guilty to-morrow because they haply may condemn my authority."

"Mobile vulgus!" pertinently answered Claude Vignet.

As he scanned the assembled people, Spifame suddenly showed such signs of anger and surprise that Vignet asked him the cause.

"Look!" said Spifame angrily. "Do you not see that pillory, retained in spite of my ordinances? Sir, the pillory is abolished, and I shall make a clean sweep of the city officials. That is, I have a good mind to do so, but it belongs to our people of Paris to do justice in this matter."

"Sire," said the poet, "will not the people be still more enraged to learn that Du Bellay's verses engraved on this fountain contain in a single line two false quantities?"

"Ho!" cries Spifame, not heeding this observation; "ho! good people of Paris! Come hither and listen!"

"Hear the King, who himself desires to speak with you!" adds Vignet, at the pitch of his voice.

Both had mounted on a high stone which supported an iron cross, Spifame standing erect, with Vignet seated at his feet. The people eagerly pressed round, thinking at first that it was some quack about to vend his ointments. But Raoul Spifame suddenly pulled off his hat, and, throwing back his mantle, displayed a sparkling collar of orders—mere tinsel and glass—which he had been allowed to wear in his confinement to flatter his mania. As the bright morning sun illuminated his face it was impossible not to recognise the true image of King Henry the Second, who was frequently seen riding through the city.

"Yes," cries Claude Vignet to the astonished mob, "it is indeed the King whom you have in your midst, and also his Minister and favourite, the illustrious poet Claudius Vignet, whose works you all know by heart."

"Good people of Paris," continues Spifame, "hear the blackest perfidy! Our Ministers are traitors, our magistrates are felons, who have held in cruel captivity your well-beloved King, as was done to the first kings of his race, and to Charles the Sixth, his illustrious grandsire."

At these words there was a murmur of surprise in the crowd. The news spread. "The King! The King!" resounded on all sides. The strange revelation set tongues a-wagging, and the uncertainty increased when Vignet pulled out the roll of edicts and decrees, and distributed them, not forgetting to mix therewith some copies of his own poetical productions.

"See," said the King, "these are the edicts we have issued for the good of our people, which have neither been published nor obeyed."

"These are," added Vignet, "the divine poems which have been traitorously pilfered and debased by Pierre de Ronsard and Mellin de Saint-Gelais."

"In the King's name the people are tyrannised over——"

"'Sophonisba' and the 'Franciade' are printed with the Royal privilege which the King has not signed——"

"Listen to the ordinance which abolishes the salt-tax, and this other which annihilates feudalism——"

But their words were no longer listened to. The papers they had scattered were eagerly read, and, passed from hand to hand, excited wonderful sympathy. There were loud exclamations of wonder and rage, and at length the excitement rose to such a pitch that they elevated the Prince and his post on a sort of improvised triumphal chair, and spoke of carrying them to the Hôtel de Ville, until they should be strong enough to attack the Louvre.

The popular movement might have become serious if this had not happened to be the day when the Dauphin's bride, Mary of Scotland, made her triumphal entry into Paris by the Porte Saint Denis. Thus, while Raoul Spifame was being carried shoulder-high in the market-square, the true King was passing on horseback along the moat of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, at no great distance. Hearing the noise of some tumult, several officers rode forward, and presently re-

turning, reported that a new King was being proclaimed on the streets.

"Let's go meet him," said King Henry, "and by the faith of a gentleman, if he is worth it, we'll offer him single combat!"

But as the halberdiers of the procession emerged from the narrow streets leading to the square, the mob stopped its advance, and presently melted away by the side alleys, as the morning mists disappear before the rising sun. The spectacle was imposing enough as the King's body-guard drew up in the square, and foot and horse lined the neighbouring streets, while on the King's breast sparkled the diamonds of all the sovereign Orders of Europe. Many cried "A miracle!" for there, in full view, were two Kings of France, with features exactly alike, both pale, both proud in mien, both garbed alike to outward appearance, only the "good King" did not sparkle quite so brilliantly as the other.

At the first movement of the soldiers towards the mob, the flight was general. Spifame and Vignet alone stood their ground, perched on the odd scaffolding on which they had been placed, and offered no resistance when they were seized and hurried before the King.

The impression made on the poor madman by the presence of the King was so strong that he fell into one of his most furious fevers, confounding as before his dual existence as Henry and Spifame, which he could not disentangle.

The King, informed of the whole story, took pity on the unfortunate gentleman, and ordered him to be taken first of all to the Louvre, where he was carefully tended, and where he for a time excited the curiosity of the Court, and, sooth to say, served sometimes to furnish amusement to the courtiers. His Majesty, having noted how, with all his strange madness, he was gentle and respectful towards himself, forbade his being again removed to the madhouse, where the perfect image of the King must sometimes be exposed to the rudeness and ridicule of visitors and menials, and ordered him to be kept in one of his castles, and cared for by special servants, who were instructed to treat him as a real Royal personage, and to call him "Sire," and "Majesty." Claude Vignet was assigned to him as a companion as before, and his poems, as well as the new ordinances which Spifame continued to compose in his retreat, were printed and preserved by the King's desire.

A complete collection of the decrees and

edicts of this pseudo-monarch was printed in the following reign under the title, "*Dicæarchiæ Henrici regis progymnasmata*," of which one or two copies survive. It is not the least remarkable part of this strange story that the reforms indicated by Raoul Spifame in these idle productions have for the most part been actually carried out since his time. Though his madness dominated his life, his intellect was unaffected, and in social and political knowledge and forethought he was far in advance of his age.

## STOCKHOLM.

### IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

It was a sufficiently keen January morning when a porter of the Angleterre Hotel of Copenhagen shouldered my portmanteau, and suggested that if I had finished my breakfast we ought to be moving towards the packet for Malmö.

"Do you think," I asked, "that the boat will get across?"

But the porter could say nothing positive on this score. According to the newspaper the ice-boat had made the journey the previous day, and though the frost had been very severe in the night, its captain might be trusted again to attempt the feat. Each journey with passengers and mails was worth a good deal to him, not only in reputation—the Sound being fast frozen everywhere save at Elsinore—but in money. Still, there was always the chance that the flocs might prove insurmountable in mid-channel. The prospect was not delightful, but it seemed worth facing. There is nothing so picturesque as a predicament. A modicum of danger often adds to the interest as well as the picturesqueness of a predicament.

And so we set off through Copenhagen's rigid streets to the scarcely less rigid harbour. Only one steamer here showed signs of activity. This was our excellent ice-boat. The captains of other vessels stood about with their hands in their pockets, watching the mails and passengers going aboard the "Bryderer," and, doubtless, wishing they too could get free. My porter saluted and left me.

"Oh," said one gentleman to another on deck, "I am not going over on business. It is something to see, a voyage of this kind. Only once in a number of years do we get such weather as this. I shall return with the 'Bryderer' this afternoon—if she can return."

Then, with an effort, the boat's powerful engines got to work, and we slowly moved through the ice, past the myriad of craft that had resigned themselves to their situation.

It was fine to see—this Northern capital, thus fast caught in ice and snow. Sailors were walking about between the different vessels, stumbling over the rough floes; gulls and countless sparrows strutted at their feet, looking keenly for scraps of garbage soft enough to be digested, and scarcely flapping their wings to get out of the way of the other bipeds; steam whistles were calling here, there, and everywhere, but the steamers themselves were all motionless except the "Bryderer."

A haze of smoke lay over Copenhagen's buildings. The Northern winter's night had not quite gone; a star or two might still be seen overhead. But ere we had moved a mile there was a lurid line in the eastern heavens, and then the sun stole upwards. Our passage was circuitous. The course the "Bryderer" had kept open was extremely serpentine, and there was but just room for the vessel. Even as it was, the frost of the night had in places welded anew the floes disturbed by yesterday's passages, so that the engines had to strain to drive us through them. Fishermen and others stood on either side of the steaming channel, within almost arm's length of our hull, and wished us luck. At one moment we faced Sweden; and yet again we seemed to be returning point-blank towards Copenhagen, whose spires and towers began to look romantic as the cold sun caught their weathercocks and made them gleam faintly through the brooding vapour.

Once in mid-Sound the cold was intense. Even with sealskin over ears and with coat-collar drawn to the nose it was hard to confront the north wind. Those of us who stayed on deck enjoying the spectacle carried ice on our faces. But it was worth putting up with this moderate inconvenience for the sake of the colours the rising sun cast upon the frozen Sound. The water where we churned it amid the floes was emerald green, while the edges of the floes we upturned were turquoise blue. The heavens were saffron-tinted, save where the sun crimsoned them brightly. North and south all was ice, thickly carpeted with snow, which took a pallid violet tinge under the increasing daylight.

So the time passed. Ten o'clock found us within sight of Sweden, and in due

time Malmö was reached. The harbour here was crowded with men robbed of their occupation by the frost. Our arrival was the one event of the day. The departure of the "Bryderer" later was an affair of secondary importance.

Malmö impresses the visitor. Its buildings are large and well designed. It carries the unmistakable mark of a commercial town of eminence. In its spacious market-place a number of red-faced countrywomen were sitting at their little booths, apparently indifferent to the cold. Less interesting goods for sale could, however, have hardly been beheld. Some sickly vegetables, bits of stiff meat, stiff poultry, and a variety of odds and ends of wearing apparel: there was little else on sale.

I was more attracted by the faces of the people. It requires an acquaintance with the three parts of Scandinavia to distinguish the Norwegian, Danish, or Swedish physiognomy. Even then, of course, one may easily come to a wrong conclusion. But to my mind, the difference between the people of Malmö and the Danes of Copenhagen was well marked. The difference is stronger in manners than in features. There is much merit in the national summary of the French writer who said: "The Swedes are the gentlemen of Scandinavia, the Danes the tradespeople, and the Norwegians the peasants." The average Dane is tolerably polite; but I hope I do his countrymen no wrong in thinking that his courtesy is that of the shopman with something to sell. The Swede of the towns—and especially of Stockholm—is more radically polite. It is engrained in him. Nor does it seem a mere veneer in him, as it is so often with the Frenchman. As for the Norwegian, he claims to be no more and no less than an honest man, and—as he tells you with a vast deal of boorish pride—therefore in no need to smirk and use fine phrases.

There is an excellent hotel at Malmö, that of Kramer. Here I spent a warm hour or two enjoying the society of two or three courteous gentlemen with Dundreary whiskers, who, like myself, were tarrying for the express to the capital. Cafés are as much the vogue in Sweden as in France, nearly; and very agreeable some of the Swedish cafés are. Kramer's is a fair example of them. It is no small thing in these cold lands to be able to retire to a snug, softly-cushioned room and coffee as good as it need be.

The express left Malmö at three o'clock, and took me with it. The distance to Stockholm is about four hundred miles, and at seven o'clock the next morning we were set adrift in the Stockholm streets. As travelling, it was no high speed. But the deficiency in pace was atoned for by the comfort of the train. It carries sleeping cars for two classes, and they are both admirable, with corridors, lavatories, and so forth. Once aboard, travellers slip off their galoshes and boots, get into slippers—and dressing-gowns if they please—and live as if they were at home. The temperature is, if anything, too warm. And there are fine broad window-panes for the prospects.

Lund, with its double-spired cathedral, was passed. We had seen the spires from the Sound, but it was good to see them again. A student or two from the University joined us. Then we plunged on in the fading daylight. Windmills, birch-trees, boulders, and snow—these now were the characteristic features of the land till the stars came out.

At Näsejö there was a break for supper. The railway meals in Sweden are excellent, and for a crown and a half (one shilling and eightpence) you sup well. Afterwards you return to the train to find the beds made.

For my part, I did not trouble my bed until late. I preferred to smoke a meditative cigar in the corridor, watching the trunks of the birch-trees scamper by outside. The moon was up, and the forests looked romantic enough in the moonlight. Forests, lakes—white all over—and very, very rare hamlets among the rocks and iceicles—such Sweden seemed to me until I began to yawn. Then I stretched myself on my upper berth, and sweltered in the heat till I slept. When I awoke it was to hear that Stockholm was at hand, and to be offered a morsel of Malmö chocolate by my travelling companion. He and I had not been able to exchange many words en route; but at parting I made out his mannerly phrase of "Thanks for your good society." It was a nice expression, even though the civility may not have been deserved. From that time forward I used the words freely in the land. They appreciate that sort of thing in Sweden.

First impressions of famous places are nearly always worth contrasting with more mature impressions of the same places. As I left the great railway station and put myself into the care of a sledge-man, I was

struck by the stillness of Stockholm and the height of the houses in the broad Vasa Street upon which the station abuts. To be sure, it was early. Yet people and vehicles were about. But they made no sound. The snow, crushed into a pale brown dust by traffic, served the purpose of the tan we lay down for our invalids. The tinkle of my sledge-bells was musical and loud in the reigning quietude, and overhead the stars shone brightly.

This impression, however, was soon ousted by the later turmoil of tram-cars and all the other incidents of life in a great city. And now I think of Stockholm as a gay and lively place, by no means suited for a dreamer of tranquil, idyllic dreams. Even in the night, as we jingled along, I could see the dark ropes of wire overhead which seemed to chain the house-tops together. These were miles upon miles of telephone—fair proof of the energy of the Swedes at conversation as well as business enterprise. I was yet to make acquaintance with the Swedish domestic interior, and learn what a considerable part the invention plays in it. Very shortly it is expected that the telephonic service in the land will be so complete, that from Malmö in the south to Haparanda in the far north—well within the Arctic Circle—a distance of about a thousand miles, you will be able to converse almost as easily as from one house to another house over the way.

Stockholm is not a very old city. It is almost a relief to know that it has no Roman remains. Archaeologically, indeed, Scandinavia is not enthralling. The Vikings were too fond of the open air to build for posterity. They have left constitutions to their descendants, not brick and stone ruins; and very fine are the physical presentments of some of these Swedes of Stockholm. Both men and women abound who are superb specimens of their kind: tall, broad, of fearless deportment, fine movement, rich complexions, and eyes blue as the sky of Naples or elsewhere. The man who comes to Sweden for antiquities must spend his days in the museums or among the Sagas, ancient and modern, which tell of the life led by the mediæval Swedes of mark.

The name Stockholm means "stick island." An explanation of this gives us a small leaf of history. There was, in old time, a certain large and wealthy town called Bieurkoo, on the northern arm of Lake



Malar, between Stockholm and Upsala. Bieurkoo's population grew too fast to satisfy the heads of the town, who forthwith consulted their idols on the subject. The wise idols, by the mouths of the priests, told the lords of Bieurkoo to try emigration. The gentlemen thereupon "took a great block of wood, to which they fastened some gold, and set the block swimming in the water, and agreed that there they would build the new town where their gods should cause the block to stay." The gods of old Sweden could in no way have shown better judgement than by arresting the lump of wood upon the shore of the island which is now the centre of modern Stockholm.

The above is the tale of Stockholm's origin told to our Ambassador Whitlocke, in 1654, when, between his interviews of state with Queen Christina, he dabbled gently in the history of the people to whom Cromwell had sent him so much against his will.

It is a pretty picture out of the dark ages. What, we wonder, would these tawny-haired ancients think if they could see Stockholm as it now is, with its many-storeyed houses rising on hills one above the other, its noble bridges spanning the lake here and there, its countless steamers, its theatres and music-halls, and its immense white Royal Palace filling an entire angle of the island against which their gold-mounted lump of pine-wood chose to rest.

I made my début in Stockholm with a warm bath, and then, having taken coffee, went forth into the streets.

This was the cold North with a vengeance. Ice and snow had had it all their own way for two or three months, and were likely to continue their away for as long again. Malar was frozen and deep in snow. Trees had been set in the ice across the lake to mark the winter roads from one side of the lake to the other. Only under the fine central bridge of the city was the water unfrozen. Here the cold current ran strong towards the Baltic—for a score or two of yards.

On an abutment of the bridge is a pleasure garden, small but chaste, adapted for music, the sweet witchery of love-talk, ices, punch, and other light refreshments. But the gardener's vocation was, of course, suspended. Snow covered the garden walks, and the black slips of trees stood from the white covering without suggestion of life, much less of summer levity. A number of iron chairs filled a corner of the

garden, and doleful sparrows had perched on them with the air of birds who had long ago given up hope of ever again beholding a nice soft worm. In July the café of the Ström parterre is charming; but in January, with the ice and snow in front, and the dark hurrying water by its side, it breeds thoughts of utter melancholy and sudden death.

Still, it is just this life of extreme contrasts that makes Stockholm so dear to the Stockholmers. In summer they can loaf, and idle, and sit in the sun like the most accomplished of Frenchmen. In winter they take to their furs, telephones, and music-halls, and skate every day. And, winter or summer, they maintain that Stockholm, the beautiful and gay, is by far the best place in the world to live in.

It is not really that; but for a tolerably robust person it may claim to be one of the best.

Money seems to go a long way here. The necessities of life are cheap. This is especially so in winter, when there is little fear of provisions spoiling. But the Stockholmers are not content with the mere necessities of life. They spend a great many crowns annually apiece on punch in music-halls, and the like palatable beverages. Punch is the national drink nowadays. Bishop Tegner tells us, in his modern Saga, how "King Ring sat on his throne on Christmas Eve and drank mead."

But King Ring's coarse, heroic epoch is dead, and King Oscar the Second, if he thirsted when on his throne, might almost be relied upon to ask for punch.

The consequence of Stockholm's excellent punch—for capable heads—and the prevailing contagion of festivity is this: as much money is needed here to live the life lived by the majority as most other European capitals exact.

For thirteence halfpenny you may dine in a refined and sufficient way at many pensions and restaurants, your waiter included. You will, however, pay just as much for but two glasses of punch in the sparkling salon of Berns in the evening. The Stockholm man about town will by no means be content with one music-hall between supper and bed-time. That means two or three "punches" per music-hall, which, in the long run, can be good neither for the purse nor the intellect.

"Ah!" said an enthusiastic Stockholmer to me one day, "we are not mean here in Sweden. We do not save, we spend.

We spend more than we earn, many of us.  
We enjoy ourselves."

But when I asked him who paid the piper eventually, he laughingly declined to face my idiom.

#### ON THE CLIFFS.

THE tide came in along the bay,  
The sunlight on the sea was streaming,  
And silver necklaces of spray  
Around the wave-worn rocks were gleaming.  
High on a jutting crag she sat—  
A fairer never sat upon it;  
She wore a dainty sailor hat,  
'Twas more becoming than a bonnet.  
Beside her, on the velvet sward,  
A gentle youth was idly lying,  
Whilst o'er the rocks the surges poured,  
And sent their pearls in thousands flying.  
She held a novel in her hand,  
And read amid its glowing pages  
Of mail-clad knights and ladies bland  
Romancing in the Middle Ages.  
How brave Sir Hugh, in armour bright,  
Won golden fame by actions thrilling;  
He did the gentler sex delight—  
In love and war his style was killing!  
She laid the volume on her knees,  
And watched a ship that, far to leeward,  
With brown sails bending to the breeze,  
Was speeding from the harbour seaward.  
When Love, that tenant of the rocks,  
Came dancing o'er the cliffs unbidden,  
And spying Violet's golden locks,  
Was soon deep in their meshes hidden.  
Cupid, you rogue, what pranks you play  
On us poor unsuspecting mortals!  
You show us radiant realms of day  
Through rosy, amaranthine portals.  
"I love you, dear," he whispered low,  
In tones so tremulous and tender,  
She could not answer him, for lo!  
Her life was lit with sudden splendour.  
Beware the cliffs! There's danger there,  
For Love, that wanton, wayward fairy,  
Has woven subtle nets to snare  
Ingenuous youths and maids unwary.  
He shoots his darts from laughing eyes,  
And sets young hearts with joy a-singing:  
But ah! sometimes the rascal flies  
While yet the wedding bells are ringing!

#### ST. LUKE'S SUMMER.

AFTER the heavy rains and heavier gales of the equinox, there frequently comes a spell of delicious calm, and the days of stress and storm are forgotten. This is the little summer of St. Luke: an interval, all too brief, in the process of the seasons, when nature seems to pause and draw breath. Mid October brings us hours of quiet sunshine, without wind or rain or cloud, and with just sufficient frost in the morning air to enable us to revel in the pleasant after-warmth.

The autumn has reached its prime, and wears its crown of gold. Daily the garment of the woods becomes more glorious. A tongue of flame sweeps across the great beech woods. Gossamer floats abundantly in the still air. The slight haze that rests early on the valley lifts gradually and reveals a pageant of surpassing beauty, flooded in a rich glow, and framed by the fair blue of the sky.

A soft grey veil that hid the hills this morning has completely disappeared. It is now nine o'clock, and the delicate curves of a great chalk down are sharply defined against a wall of blue. Its slopes face southwards; at present steeped in the brilliant sunlight of an October morning, undimmed by a particle of mist. Recent heavy rains, strong winds, and a touch of frost last night, have so refined and purified the atmosphere that every juniper bush stands out clear and distinct with its spot of shadow beneath. The red purple of the dogwood tints every coombe and fissure; dashes of warm yellow appear among the hazel copses; and, in the little fir wood towards the summit, orange streaks show among the larches.

The clear crisp air without stir or motion seems to magnify and diffuse the sunlight, and to deepen its mellow tone. What matter that two days ago the heavy clouds were dragged across these hills in drenching rain, or that the very brilliance of the atmosphere forbids us to count upon a long continuance of fine weather. Just now the picture is complete; and without any special glory of fading leaf, you realise to some extent the warmth and colour that an October sun-glow can produce. Close at hand is an old farmhouse. It possesses no architectural beauties whatever. Yet how the sunshine sparkles on the dull weather-worn bricks and tiles; how it softens and, at the same time, intensifies the green and amber mosses; and brings out every colour of the lichens that have clung for generations to roof, and wall, and barn, and paling. The pale yellow leaves of a group of limes absorb the beautiful glow; it is sent back in flashes of scarlet and gold from a single horse-chestnut, and bathes in a warm flood the grass of a little tangled orchard. It glistens on the webs that wreath the briars and brambles outside; and twinkles on the beads of dew that hang on the brake fern and the long grass blades.

The martin nests underneath the eaves

are forsaken; for the house martins, the last of the swallow tribe to take their departure, headed south over a fortnight ago. With the swallows, all the summer migrants are now fled; the redwings are yet to come. Just beyond the litter of the farmyard, four black pigs are raking about a great heap of refuse; and pecking away close beside them are at least a score of grey wagtails, with backs of bluish grey and long grey tails. These are new arrivals, for the grey wagtail is an autumn visitor. They come as the pied wagtail (or dishwasher) leaves us. Very light and active they seem, and the colouring of their plumage most delicate. The name of this species of wagtail is deceptive, for it is not grey, but yellow, that is its most conspicuous colour. The throat and the upper part of the breast are a bright canary tint, with a crescent of jet black beneath. It is odd to see them moving about this black filth, keeping close to a pig's snout and forefeet, till at times it seems as if they must be trodden on. Birds of many kinds are attracted to the same heap. A number of young starlings are stalking to and fro, whistling and chattering a good deal. Branchers of a few weeks ago, they are just beginning to get their fuller plumage, and the brown coats are splashed with glossy black and purple feathers tipped with pearl. Every now and then, with a good deal of fuss and clatter, they make for one of the oaks in the meadow, keeping their wings stationary and expanded like a fan when entering the tree. A small flock of greenfinches are pecking about the edges of the rubbish, twittering as they fly off. There are several cock chaffinches, just recovered from their moult, each chiefly concerned to see that his neighbour does not get a choicer morsel than himself, and occasionally chasing him in a state of great excitement across the adjacent fields. Once or twice a couple of wagtails with dipping flight will go off in the same way, but without the vicious energy of the chaffinches. A few linnets are far less assertive; and, unable to elbow their way in the busy crowd, they retire to a hurdle close by, and sit there looking on, ruffling their feathers, and apparently envying the restless determination of the sparrows.

A rough and narrow lane leads upward and over the brow of the hill. In no hurry to climb the steep, it wanders round some empty cornfields, at first just a means of communication between them and the

farm. Yellow straws still cling to the little wayside oaks, and although in the shadier parts of the hedge bank the grasses are white and drenched with dew, there are still a few wild flowers left. But they are insignificant beside the array of colour furnished by fading and fallen leaf. The herb-robert still sends forth its persistent pink stars, but they seem pale indeed beside the vivid scarlet of the horse-chestnut or the deep crimson of the bird-cherry. Hawkweeds, ragwort, nippewort, fleabane, spotted hypericum, and a few other yellow blossoms along the lane, are inconspicuous beneath the fiery tones of the hedge maples. The silverweed no longer hides its sulphur blooms in the roadside grasses; but the pale emerald, bronze, and buff tints of its fernlike leaves work a richer border than ever. In a sunny spot a wild strawberry ventures a timid bloom, and the white lips of the dead nettle cluster below. The lilac flowers of the scabious still brave the early frosts, a few purple heads of knapweed are thrust through the bunches of dead parsley, and the wild radish scatters its little pale crosses among the stubbles. Some stalks of campanula have one or two late bells, a few betony spikes show here there, and slender harebells swing among the dry grass bennets.

Many of the bushes of the lane are closely intertwined and overlaid with long sprays and festoons of the wild clematis, or old man's beard, till in parts the hedge seems to be composed of clematis and nothing else. Its woody stems look like ropes; the leaves have assumed a yellowish green, and the tufts of feathered seed-vessels lie upon them in a network of white silk. The elder-bushes have been rifled by the birds, but the sides of the lane are tinted with the pale buff and rose-pink of their fading leaves. Although the nuts are gone from the hazels, there is a plentiful store of berries in the hedgerows. They are not confined to the lane. Every depression in the chalk has its bushes, and every bush is heavy with berries. Perhaps the prettiest of all are the rose-coloured lobes of the spindle-tree. If opened, the seeds will be found enclosed in a further wrapping of brilliant orange. But the shrub, although by no means uncommon, must be looked for. It has a way of hiding itself among the other growths, and its berries seldom crown the hedge like the crimson fruit of the hawthorn, or the ruddy hips of the briar roses. Another

shrub easily overlooked is the alder buckthorn, with its smooth, oval, quivering leaves, and its little dark blue berries.

Long streamers of bryony add much to the life and beauty of the lane. I think if I had to give a specimen of the beauty of an English hedgerow, I would cull a spray of white bryony. For there are two perfectly distinct plants which go by the name of bryony, distinguished as the white and the black. Each is the sole British representative of a tropical order of plants. The black bryony belongs to the yam tribe; the white to that of the gourds, the tribe that has given us our cucumbers and melons. Both kinds are growing here. The white bryony is of very rapid growth, and passes through and among the bushes in the gentlest of curves. Among the climbing plants is there another that can quite equal for grace and elegance its vine-like leaves; its slender stems and spirals; its exquisite light-coloured flowers with their delicate veins; finally its rounded berries, at first the same green shade as leaf and stem, gradually turning orange or scarlet, and brightening the hedge long after the frosts have dried and shrivelled the rest of the plant? The berries of the black bryony are similar in colour, only larger, and during July and August they hang in the hedge like grapes. Each leaf is the shape of a heart, the uniform glossy green now changed to bronze, buff, purple, and bright yellow.

Not far off the lane is an overgrown chalk-pit, the sides clothed with big red hawthorns and purple sloes. A bird-cherry stands in the centre beneath, one mass of glowing, fiery colour. Scattered up and down are the clustering stems and heavy leaves of the little wayfaring-trees. These are a coarser species of viburnum, but the berries are flattened, and though red now, will turn black as winter approaches. They have none of the rich transparent beauty that belongs to the viburnum opulus or guelder rose. This latter shrub is now in all its glory, hung from root to crown with bunches of deep red berries. The guelder rose of the woods is quite different from the "snowball-tree" of the garden. The wild roses, too, are a snowy white, but almost flat in shape, and the singular feature about them is, that what at first sight we take to be the flower is only a chaplet of mock blossom, without stamen or pistil, intended to attract the winged insects to the central florets. While the pride of

the wild plant is its rich autumn fruit, the cultivated species bears only barren flowers.

The orange beak of a blackbird is busy on a bunch of carmine spindle fruit, till suddenly he is off with a noisy chuckle to a yew-tree. But a couple of missel-thrushes are in possession there, and the invader is mercilessly driven back with harsh and angry cries. For the yew is laden with berries, set in their beautiful coral cups—berries dearly loved by the mistletoe-thrush, which forsakes the last clusters of the mountain ash for them. There seem to be a good many of these big birds about, for every now and then their grating note, like the winding of a rusty Dutch clock, mingles with the clatter of their wings as they hold the yew-trees against all comers. It is not easy to get a fair sight of them, but the white of their under wing-coverts distinguishes them from time to time as they slip round a big bush.

Upward still, as the lane winds round a piece of woodland, and a squirrel scamper across. He has exchanged his red summer coat for a winter fur of brown-grey. Up the bank he goes, drawing his long silver-tipped tail over the fallen leaf. With a gurgling, scolding chatter he darts up a larch to the second fork, then stops and looks back deliberately, pricking his ears, and wagging his tail vigorously as a cat does when angry. Further in the wood, a second squirrel sits on the fork of a beech, munching like a monkey a beech-nut held in his forepaws. The "mast" is ripe now, and the squirrels haunt the beeches all day. They have rifled the hazels, and the pine cones can wait awhile. The beech stems being smooth and polished, and generally bare of branches for a considerable distance, the squirrels climb the smaller trees and leap from them on to the broad fans of the higher beech boughs. Ripe beech-mast proves a great attraction also to the ring-doves, which visit the trees in foraging parties. Shy and wary, they are but little seen, and only the occasional flip-flop of their powerful wings tells where they have been feasting.

A flute-like note repeated once or twice is followed by a bubbling sound, and a glance upward reveals a nuthatch, a patch of dull orange-red on one of the branches. Now he is underneath, and his blue-grey back comes into view as he creeps along the horizontal bough to the main stem, and t'en begins travelling



head foremost down the tree. He has no doubt just wedged a hazel-nut in the trunk preparatory to forcing the shell with his beak. Now he is resting midway, his claws grasping the rough bark, and his head at right angles to his plump little body, showing the white spot on his throat. A dark streak drawn across his bright round eye looks like a continuation of the pointed beak. His present attitude is characteristic. The tree-creeper works a tree upwards, and his longer body, beak, and tail always curve to the tree trunk. The nuthatch seems equally at home in any position, while his short tail never gets in his way.

High winds and battering rains have thinned the leaves of the outer trees, so that it is possible to watch a good deal of the life of the wood from the lane. Nests that a short while ago were completely hidden are now visible. A loud "squawk, chawk," is followed by a flash of blue and white wings, and a couple of jays settle themselves among the top branches of an oak. Acorns at this season apparently furnish a repast to birds of usually very different appetites; but while the majority, like the pheasant, are content to help themselves to the fallen brown nuts that are now lying all about the grass of the meadows, the jay and the rook must pick theirs from the oak itself.

Not many sounds disturb the silence of these woods. Now and then comes the low pipe of a bullfinch; a thrush utters a stave, as if trying over his notes; a wren sings a short strain; or the sweet, leisurely cadence of the robin breaks the stillness. But the birds are intent on other matters than singing, and the most frequent sounds are the tap of a falling acorn or beech-mast, or the lingering rustle of another leaf seeking the broad bosom of mother earth.

As the lane reaches the hillside, the bushes increase in size considerably, till from fieldside hedges they become a tangle of forest growths. The tints, too, are further advanced here. Green and scarlet, russet and gold, brown and purple; the colours massed and intermingled in endless gradations and exquisite harmonies. Where the brilliant sunlight plays, they are intensified a hundredfold. Dark yews mingle with scarlet thorns and orange maples; feathery ash-trees overhang, their leaves now a pale olive tint. Privet and dogwood, viburnum and wild rose, tall brambles and elder bushes combine to produce a glowing

succession of warm hues and a wealth of autumn fruit. And still the clematis climbs to the topmost boughs, and over all but the changeless yews flings its pallid streamers like a robe. For a mile or more these towering hedgerows shut off the prospects around, and form a winding aisle in which to study to one's heart's content all the varied tones and mellow richness of the autumn. Then they cease suddenly. We are on the crisp, velvety turf of the downs, high up among the grey junipers, overlooking the great beech woods of the river valley, and a broad, beaming landscape beyond.

## TWO LETTERS.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

### CHAPTER I.

LETTICE had always been considered the beauty of the family. She was not clever like Emma, nor musical like Lenore. She was simply beautiful and nothing more. Men seemed to find that quite enough.

There were four of us, Lettice, Emma, Lenore, and myself. I was the youngest, and occupied the proud position of being Lettice's bosom friend. We all lived in a great rambling barrack of a house in the little seaside town of Brunton, and our father was the Rector of the church there. Our income was not by any means large; our visiting list was soon exhausted. It may easily be seen, therefore, that the chance of four pretty, penniless lasses getting "wooded, and married, and a'," was very remote indeed. Still, we felt we were entitled to build high hopes upon Lettice.

She was tall, and fair as a lily, and almost as pale. But then her cheeks wore the creamy, healthy tint which to a right-minded man is worth all the rosy cheeks in existence. She had crisp, golden hair that always looked enchanting, whether it were smooth or whether it were rough; a pair of the deepest blue eyes that ever it has been my luck to see; and a slender, willowy figure, which in some people's eyes was her chief charm.

And yet Lettice was wasting her sweetness on the desert air. Twenty-five, and still unwed!

Of course, there was always Arthur Wells, who had been desperately in love with her from his youth up, but then he

did not count at all. Indeed, Lettice was cruel enough on one occasion to refer to him as "an alleviating circumstance," which, considering his intense adoration for her, was hardly feeling.

Arthur Wells was old Sir Ludovic Wells's nephew, and, had there been no other Wells in the case, would without doubt have succeeded to his uncle's title and estates, the latter bringing in a respectable rent-roll of five thousand a year. But then, as the Fates would have it, Sir Ludovic owned two stalwart, handsome sons; and nothing was more unlikely than that they should be polite enough to remove themselves from this troublesome world, in order to leave the stage clear for their cousin Arthur.

No; Ludovic the younger and Henry his brother thrive and waxed great in strength and health. There was not the ghost of a chance for Arthur, who could hardly have the audacity to propose seriously to the beautiful Lettice that they should shut themselves up together for life in a semi-detached villa, on three hundred pounds a year, to murmur at the price of coal and butter! No, the thing could not be done, and Arthur was wise enough to resign himself to fate.

There were very few young men of any kind in Brunton, and those of a desperately ineligible character. There was the curate—a knock-kneed, shambling creature, with bright red hair and green eyes—and the doctor, a struggling young practitioner, who, to judge from appearances, might possibly be able to afford to marry when Lettice was well on to forty years of age.

Affairs were certainly not very promising. We should blush unseen for ever unless something happened. We did not blush unseen for ever.

One day in early summer, when the dog-roses were at the zenith of their delicate beauty, my father came in to us, as we were all sitting at work in our own especial sanctum, with a letter in his hand.

Here let me say that my father was the most unworldly of men. He liked us "girls" to be always about him. I believe it would have grieved him to the heart if he had had to part with one of us. Such a thing as matrimony, especially looked upon from a mercenary point of view, never even occurred to him at all. We girls had the sense to keep our matrimonial chatter and hopes to ourselves. The letter which he had just received, and which was destined to elate us, only depressed him.

There was rather a worried expression on his placid brow.

"An old college friend of mine has just written to me, girls," he announced, "to ask me to look after his son, who is coming here for a month or so for his health."

We pricked up our ears at once.

"Who is it?" we asked in chorus.

We knew that father had known some very "big wigs" in those far-off College days of his, although he was too modest to even mention them. Was Fate about to smile upon us at last?

"The young man is a foreigner," said my father slowly, "and his name is the Count da Castello."

To say that our eyes nearly fell out of our heads at this piece of news would be but a poor and feeble way of expressing our astonishment.

A Count—a real live Count, certain to be rich, and in all probability handsome! We all looked at Lettice, who blushed consciously. The fish that was about to walk into the net was almost a whale in size and importance.

"Why, papa," said Lenore, "whatever is he coming to this poky little place for?"

My father flushed slightly. He would have been less embarrassed if a crossing-sweeper had asserted claims as to ancient friendship.

"His father and I were great friends long ago, my dears. He is kind enough to wish his son to make my acquaintance, and as the place is very healthy and the Count is not very strong, he wishes him to be here for a while. Of course he will stay at the hotel. The Duc da Castello writes a very kind letter," he added, looking at the paper in his hand. We had none of us before ever had the least idea that my father had ever spoken to a Duke in his life, and though it was but a foreign Duke—well, a Duke's a Duke for all that.

Of course we had dozens of questions to ask, all of which my father answered with his usual gentle patience.

The young Count had been in England before—oh, yes, and could speak English fairly well. He would probably be about six or seven-and-twenty—not a young boy by any means. Rich—yes, he was certainly rich—very wealthy indeed, he believed. As to how we were to amuse him, that was quite a different thing. He supposed young people always got on together somehow. Luckily it was summer, and we could golf and play tennis to our hearts' content. He hoped we would do

our best to make things pleasant for the stranger.

"Poor dear daddy," said Lenore, with a half-remorseful smile as he went out at the door. "He has no idea what a mercenary, money-hunting lot we are, or he wouldn't press us to be quite so pleasant."

"But after all, it is glorious news," said Emma meditatively. "I do envy you, Lettice!"

She sighed as she looked at herself in the glass.

"No one has a chance when you are by," she added discontentedly. "I am quite nice-looking when you are out of the room."

We all laughed, and began to discuss our wardrobe, and what were the most suitable costumes for fascinating the foreign eye. Lettice was unusually silent. Indeed, she had hardly spoken at all. She smiled faintly when we suggested all the fine things she could do for us when once she was the Countess da Castello, and told us with sensible severity not to be so foolish as to count our chickens before they were hatched.

"I never yet knew the man who didn't admire you," said Emma sturdily. "Take all the men about here, for instance—they are a precious poor lot, still they are men—and see if I'm not right! Mr. Potter fell head over ears in love at first sight, and Dr. Hemingway would propose to-morrow if he thought you would accept him. As for Arthur Wells——"

She paused with a significant shrug of the shoulders that spoke volumes. Lettice gathered up her work in her arms and went out of the room with a slight flush on her fair face. In spite of her light talk about Arthur Wells, there were times when we were none of us very sure as to what were her real feelings on the subject. Not even to me—me, the favoured confidente—did she ever say one syllable about him save in a jesting way.

But she began to talk of her own accord that night about the Count da Castello.

"I wonder what he will be like," she said meditatively, as she unwound her long fair hair and began to brush it slowly before retiring for the night.

We shared the same room, and many had been the girlish confidences and hopes that those four walls had heard.

"He will be very dark, of course," I replied, "and perhaps handsome. But that doesn't matter so much if he is nice. I rather like ugly men."

Lettice went on brushing out the veil of fair hair that fell far below her waist.

"The most important thing of all is that he should fall in love with you," I went on from my perch on the deep, old-fashioned window-seat, where I was sitting gazing out into the starry June night; "and, fortunately, there isn't much doubt about that."

"You are a silly child!" returned my sister, with rather ungrateful petulance. "You think, because all the weedy creatures here admire me, that a rich and handsome foreigner of title is certain to ask me to be his wife. Absurd!"

"Should you have him if he did?" I asked curiously.

"Without the slightest hesitation."

I always liked matrimonial discussions with Lettice, because we held such very different views on the subject. I, being young and sentimental, was all for love; Lettice, with all the stern, practical common-sense of twenty-five unmarried years, was all for money.

"You might not like him," I suggested, after a pause.

"It would take a great deal to make me dislike a rich young Count," returned Lettice, with a curl of her lip. "I am more tired than I can tell you of the life we are leading now. I want to enjoy myself, and see the world, and be admired," she added frankly.

I clasped my hands round my knees, and began again.

"Supposing that you were unhappy after you married him? Supposing you saw some one else you liked better?"

"I shouldn't be unhappy after I was married," returned my sister decidedly. "I am not in the least sentimental."

"I think it is very wrong indeed to marry for money," I said, with sudden virtue.

"So do I—in theory. But now and then one can't help oneself. It is generally the wrong man who has the fortune," she added, with unusual bitterness.

I determined to approach a subject on which I had always felt the deepest curiosity, but which I had never ventured to seriously allude to before.

"Lettice!"

"Well?"

"Do you—are you—how do you feel—really, I mean—about Arthur Wells?"

Lettice turned her head away, but not before I had seen her flush.

"He is a nice boy," she said carelessly,

"and so useful and pleasant, too. I am very fond of Arthur."

"But you wouldn't marry him?"

"*Pas si bête*," my dear. I should be unhappy after that marriage, if you like."

"Why?"

"I should feel I had thrown myself away; and, what is more, I am afraid I should make him feel it, too. I put aside the idea years ago, Ellen, and Arthur knows it."

"It is very hard if—if you like him," I remarked, a little surprised at her extreme calmness.

"I like him quite as much as I shall ever like any one; but I dare say that isn't very much, after all. At any rate, it is not enough to make me sacrifice my whole future life for his sake."

She plaited her soft hair closely as she spoke, and smiled at her own fair image in the glass.

"It's very funny that I don't feel more," she remarked, half to herself; "but at the same time it is extremely convenient."

I did not believe myself that she was nearly as heartless as she chose to make out, and in spite of the handsome phantom of the future, I rather preferred the present suitor.

But nothing would induce Lettice to talk any more about him that night. She had put aside her fancy for him once and for all with a firm hand, and she was not the kind of girl to be entrapped into half-sentimental admissions of regret.

Three days later the Count arrived upon the scene.

I do not think we have any of us ever forgotten the afternoon he came. We were sitting in the big old sunny drawing-room just before tea. All the windows were open, and the scent of the sweet-briar hedges, for which the Rectory was famous, floated in and filled the air with pungent fragrance. Lettice was sitting at the window with the sun shining full upon her fair head, turning every thread of it to deep, deep gold.

"My dear," said my father's voice suddenly behind her, "let me introduce my old friend's son to you. Count da Castello, this is my eldest daughter Lettice."

She turned with a swift, surprised flush on her usually pale face, and I thought I had never seen her look so lovely. I was not surprised at the look of bold and open admiration with which the Count regarded her.

He was undoubtedly an extremely handsome man, but for all that I felt a thrill of unutterable repugnance towards him. I wondered if Lettice felt it too. He was tall and slender, with clearly-cut features and a haughty, aristocratic air. He was dark as an Italian brigand, handsome as a Spanish toreador. His eyes were almost sombre in their velvet blackness.

But there was no doubt whatever that he was very much struck with Lettice. Father asked him to tea as a matter of course, and ten minutes later we were all sitting round that famous table of ours, which seemed to be able to hold any number of extra people without inconvenience.

The Count had a soft and mellow voice, and what I suppose must be called fascinating manners. He spoke English to perfection, with just a touch of foreign accent which made it all the more taking; but every now and then he lapsed unconsciously into Italian, correcting himself with a slight laugh at his own forgetfulness, and he invariably addressed us as "*Signorina*."

He professed himself delighted with the quaint gabled Rectory and its wandering rooms. There was an old-world flavour, he declared, in the shabby, spindle-legged furniture, the old blue china, and the oak-panelled parlours. He raved, too, over the odour of sweet-briar, which pervaded everything with its wholesome fragrance. Its perfume was, he said, "*so fresh, so English*."

The budding flowers in the garden, too, came in for a share of ecstasie admiration as we wandered idly thither after tea was over. The Count was disposed to admire anything and everything in his present frame of mind.

Lettice was quieter than usual. Certainly the Count was enthusiastic and ardent enough for both. She need take no trouble whatever. He was plainly at her feet already. He was apparently going to succumb without a struggle. Unless, indeed, he were one of those masculine flirts who make love to every pretty woman they meet with almost equal ardour. Time and the future would show that. At present he talked to no one but Lettice, and had eyes for no one but Lettice. So far everything was as it should be.

When he had gone I asked her how she liked him. Emma and Lenore were loud in their praises—so handsome, so fascinating, with such enchanting manners! And his eyes! Had we noticed his eyes?



"Yes, I noticed his eyes," said Lettice.

If it had not been dusk I should have thought that she looked troubled and uneasy. As it was, I fancied the fast-falling twilight might have deceived me.

"Do you like him?" I persisted.

She roused herself from a meditative reverie with a start and a distinct shiver.

"I don't know, Ellen," she answered slowly. "But I should not like to have him for my enemy."

#### CHAPTER II.

Two days later the Count sent Lettice an enormous bouquet of beautiful roses—a truly foreign way of showing admiration, as we English country-bred damsels thought. We could not imagine where he had got such flowers from—great deep crimson-hearted roses and exquisite fragile white ones, almost every variety, indeed, that it is possible to imagine. We thought he must have bribed some gardener to give him the contents of a greenhouse whose owner was temporarily absent; but afterwards we learned that he had telegraphed to London for them.

Lettice sat with the gorgeous flowers in her lap with an odd expression on her face, while we clustered round her and loudly extolled the Count and congratulated her on her good fortune. She did not say anything for a while; then she swept the roses with a sudden petulant movement from her lap to the floor; some of the scented petals fell from the heart of the flowers and lay upon the carpet.

"I wish he had not sent them," she said, with an almost violent impatience in her voice.

I stooped to pick the lovely, innocent things up. As I did so a shadow darkened the doorway, and, looking up, to my horror I saw that the Count himself had been a witness of this little scene. Possibly, too, he had heard Lettice's petulant remark. He had followed his gift almost immediately.

"Am I so unfortunate that my little offering is displeasing to the Signorina?" he asked politely from the doorway, where he remained standing.

His eyes—the eyes that we all admired so much, and which Lettice shuddered away from—were fixed on her face with a half-mocking, half-dominant expression in their sombre depths.

Lettice blushed crimson and muttered hastily something about his "kindness," and that she was "very fond of flowers."

"So I thought until just now," said the young Count, with his most imperturbable expression of countenance, advancing up the room.

We began to feel uneasy and embarrassed. It was an uncomfortable scene altogether, and for once in our lives we felt rather ashamed of Lettice. How could she treat the Count's present with such impatient ingratitude? One by one we disappeared from the room, and they were left together.

"He is certain to propose," said Emma, when we had safely reached our own sanctum, "if she treats him at all properly. What a pity he came in just then, and how stupid of Lettice to be in such a temper! I only wish he would send roses to me."

"I expect it is only a foreign custom and doesn't mean much," I remarked astutely. "He may not be in love with her after all."

"You have only got to look at his eyes to see that," said Emma very decidedly. "He never takes them off her, and he looks at her in such a way—I am sure I should feel quite uncomfortable."

"I wonder what will happen, and what he is saying to her now?" said Lenore musingly. "Foreigners are so quick in things of this kind."

I said nothing, but like the parrot in the story, I thought the more.

Emma was quite right in saying that the young Count was desperately in love. There was a sort of fierceness in his eyes when he looked at Lettice, that boded ill for her in the future if she crossed or thwarted him. It was a curious affair all through—shrinking repulsion on one side, combined with a strange fascination, and fiery, passionate, overbearing love on the other. I wondered which would win the day.

I had not long to wait. As Lenore remarked, foreign courtship is evidently carried on in a very rapid fashion. At the end of a fortnight, Lettice came into our room one day after she had been walking about with the Count, and threw herself into a chair with something very like a groan.

"What is the matter?" I asked from my seat in the deep window, where I was reading, unobserved.

"Oh, are you there, Ellen?" said my sister, with rather a vexed expression.

Then after a pause she added:

"Well, you would have to know some day, and you may just as well know first as last. Besides, I would rather you

heard it before the others. The Count has proposed to me, Ellen."

I dropped my novel, finding a real romance more interesting than the fictitious personages in the book.

"When?" I demanded breathlessly.

"About a quarter of an hour ago—in the rose-garden."

She began to play absently with some flowers in her belt, pulling them slowly to pieces in rather a vindictive fashion. They were very rare flowers, and I knew the Count had given them to her.

"What did you say," I asked curiously, "and what did he say?"

"He?"

She laughed a little, and then sighed.

"Oh, the usual rhodomontade, of course! Men are very much alike all the world over. Only the Count is—is—more so!"

"That means that he made desperate love to you, I suppose," I said slowly.

"Well, yes, that is what it amounts to."

She threw away the flowers she had been playing with suddenly.

"I tell you, Ellen, the man terrifies me," she said, in a very different tone from the one she had been using. "He is so earnest, so fierce, so—mad!"

I looked at her in some surprise. Her face was quite white, and her lips were trembling. It was very unlike Lettice to be so moved about anything. I got down from my perch in the window-seat, and put a protecting arm about her.

"But you needn't marry him, Lettice dear, if you feel like that about him. Of course, we all talked a great deal of nonsense about your being a Countess and all that—and it would have been very nice, too—but it certainly isn't worth while being so wretched about it."

She sat quite still, breathing rather quickly. Then she got up and began to take off her things.

"I have promised to marry him, Ellen, and I cannot draw back now. Besides, I have no wish to. I shall be very rich, I shall have a title, and my husband will adore me. What more can I want? Should I do better if I were to stay on here and end by marrying Dr. Hemingway?"

She laughed a little, but I couldn't.

"Lettice, I am sure you will be horribly unhappy," I said earnestly. "You ought not to marry him if you don't like him."

"I do like him—immensely," she said contradictorily, "and I have been very foolish to talk as I have been doing. The only fault I can find with him is that he

loves me too much—and that is certainly a fault that time will mend. Come, Ellen," she added gaily, "don't look at me with those desperate, frightened eyes. The Count won't eat me, and I mean to be very happy."

She kissed me, and we went downstairs together, hand in hand. But I did not feel easy, for all that. That the Count had some influence over her I had no doubt, but it was an influence that had elements of repulsion in it. It struck me that a boa constrictor and a rabbit might very well stand as examples of the relations between Lettice and the Count. But these sentiments I kept to myself.

Lettice announced her engagement to the family the next day. She was then in possession of a magnificent diamond betrothal ring, and the Count had received my father's permission for the match.

The Count himself was quite perfect in his behaviour to us all. He came every day after this, and brought us innumerable and costly presents. The gifts he showered on Lettice had legion for their name. I don't think I ever saw a man more devotedly attached to a woman. And yet Lettice could not prevent herself, try as she would, from treating him with cold indifference. The Count seemed to love her all the more for her caprices.

He often talked to me about her, as he knew she liked me better than the rest. His handsome face and splendid eyes would light up with pleasure at the mere mention of her name. Foreigners are proverbially less reticent than their English brethren in their "*affaires de cœur*," and I was the recipient of many curious rhapsodies on the subject of my sister's charms.

"Only to think," said Da Castello to me one day, when Lettice had left us alone together for a few minutes, "only to think that if I had not come to England this time I should never have seen her! My beautiful lily—the one woman in the world for me! What should I have done without her?"

His eyes were following her retreating form with an expression of ecstatic tenderness in them.

I brought him down to earth again.

"You would have married some one else," I said bluntly.

"Never!" said the Count, turning his mysterious eyes on me. "I should have gone through life without having found my twin soul."

"You might not have found your twin soul, but you would have married all the

same. Besides, how do you know that Lettice is your twin soul?"

"By the power of my love for her," he answered fiercely. "I think I love her as no man ever loved woman before." ("They all say that," was my mental note.) "If she were in the furthestmost depths of hell I should go in search of, and rescue her."

I understood why Da Castello sometimes terrified his English sweetheart. Certainly he had a very strong way of putting things, and his eyes had a glow in them which was not altogether tranquillising.

"That is all very well now," I replied, "but how about the future? You don't really understand Lettice, and I am quite sure she does not understand you. A foreigner can never hope to comprehend an Englishwoman."

Da Castello gave a short laugh.

"Love has no nationality," he observed, with superb scorn; "when two souls love each other, they don't stop to ask whether their bodies are French or German."

"No, but they sometimes fall out about the cooking afterwards," I rejoined smartly.

"You are a funny child, Ellen," he remarked patronisingly. "As if Lettice and I should ever fall out about anything! As for such a sordid question as cookery——" he shrugged his shoulders in a truly foreign fashion, expressive of the deepest disdain, and became silent.

I remembered that possibly, as he was so immensely rich, the question of cookery might not be a vexed one between them. If they had been poor it would have been a different thing.

Da Castello began to rhapsodise again.

"How fair she is!" he murmured, his eyes soft and dreamy once more; "so fair and cold, like a snow image! And her eyes are blue and cold too, like some of your tranquil English lakes."

"I wonder you admire coldness so much," I said shortly; "but certainly Lettice gives you plenty of it."

For by this time, in spite of the magnificence of my future brother-in-law's presents, and the general impeachability of his behaviour, I highly disapproved of the match. I was convinced that Lettice would be, and was, wretched.

"That is what I like," he answered. "She is so different from other women; she never tries to attract; she is so royally indifferent."

Possibly the young, handsome, and wealthy Count had not found "royal indifference" a distinguishing trait of the average

woman. But could he not distinguish between indifference and repulsion? It appeared not. He went on after a pause:

"Is it not singular, Ellen, our names begin with the same letter even! That is one proof the more that we were meant for each other."

His name was Luigi. Love likes to harp on these pleasant trifling coincidences, but to me they appeared to be childish.

"Then if her name had been Hannah, or Maria, you wouldn't have fallen in love with her, I suppose?" I asked him sarcastically. But he answered quite frankly:

"I do not know. One cannot tell, but no doubt, as we were born under the same star, I should have loved her under any name. She is my fate. She has been kept for me. But what is the use of discussing these things with you, my little Ellen; you, who believe neither in fate nor love?"

"Nor astrology," I wound up, for a tendency to belief in astrology was one of the Count's strongest weaknesses.

"Nor astrology," he said, quite good-humouredly. "So you see there is nothing left for me to talk about."

I wondered privately what he talked about to Lettice, who took no more interest in the above subjects than I did myself. For did she not trample love under foot, defy fate, and scoff at the Count's horoscopes?

It appeared, however, that Da Castello talked to her on one subject, and one only. It is left to the reader to guess which one that is. Lettice's indifference did not pique him. He liked his little snow image all the better for its iciness.

It may be supposed that so ardent a lover as the Count did not let the grass grow under his feet. He was impatient to marry his fair bride, and carry her back to his vast estates in sunny Italy. I was the unwilling listener to the conversation which took place between them when Da Castello first broached the subject to her.

I was sitting in the drawing-room with the windows wide open to admit the warm breath of July air, and the Count and Lettice were seated on a rustic bench immediately beneath it. I did not know they were there for some time; they were so silent. And when they began to speak I did not like to attract attention by moving away.

"Dearest," said Luigi da Castello, with an ineffable tenderness in his deep tones, "you have not given me my answer yet. Why do you delight in torturing me so?"

He evidently referred to some question he had previously asked her. There was a ring of fear as well as of impatience in Lettice's tones as she answered him.

"We are very well as we are. You are always in such a hurry. I cannot possibly decide anything yet."

Perhaps on this occasion the much-vaunted and much-admired indifference and iciness of his divinity were not quite so much to her lover's taste as usual.

"You don't understand how I want you, dear. I long to bear you away to my own sunny land, the fairest bride that Italy has ever seen."

A slight and scornful laugh was the only answer she gave.

"When will you tell me?" he urged fiercely. "When will you let me know? Why should we not be married at once? What is there to hinder us?"

"Hundreds of things."

"If you loved me as much as I love you, you would find no obstacle to our union."

"But I don't love as you do," said Lettice, in a troubled voice. "I have told you that before."

"I know you have been frankness and sincerity itself with me. I adore you for that little icy air of indifference. I shall soon teach you to change your nature."

She stirred a little uneasily.

"I shall never alter, Luigi," she said, after a pause. "I think it is my duty to tell you that I shall never be different. I have no very strong feelings as you have. If you think I shall not satisfy you——"

She broke off.

"You do satisfy me—just as you are. You are an angel of sweetness, and coldness, and purity. I envy no man alive. I have won my ideal. When will she be mine—mine utterly?"

He bent down and kissed her hand. I heard the salute distinctly, and the slight shiver that followed it. Poor Lettice! What a blind fool the man was, not to see that her indifference would not take long to turn to hatred! But then Love is and always has been blind. When his eyes are opened he is no longer Love.

"I cannot tell," she said, in a low voice, in answer to his last question.

"Do you expect me to go on in this way for ever?" demanded the eager lover.

"For ever! And we have been engaged for only three weeks."

"Three centuries rather."

She rose with a very decided movement from the bench.

"I will not fix a day," she cried angrily.

"I will never marry you at all if you tease me so about it. Why cannot you be content to wait like other men?"

Perhaps she had Arthur Wells and his patient, hopeless waiting in her mind. What was a rule for a sensible young Englishman, however, could not be expected to apply to her fiery Italian Count.

Da Castello seized on her last words and repeated them with a frown.

"Like other men? What do you know about other men?" he said.

There was thunder in his voice.

"Nothing," she answered hastily. "I only meant that in England we are not used to such short engagements—the idea is strange, and—and——"

She raised her eyes with a half-terrified appeal in them to his face, as if to impress the truth of her words upon him.

"That is all," she repeated nervously.

He bent and kissed her hand again. His trust in her was almost piteously absolute.

"You must remember that we Italians are an impatient, hot-blooded race," he said to her, with an apologetic smile, "and we do not know the meaning of delay. But I will wait for you, my queen, were it half a lifetime, if such is your desire. I will trust to the power of my love, that my probation will not be long."

He was very much, oh, very much in earnest! I heard Lettice sigh as she turned away from her too handsome, too devoted lover.

There were, doubtless, moments in her life when she would have preferred from him flagrant and open neglect.

For of such strange caprices is woman made.

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